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State-San Diego County Courthouse Property Exchanges Approved *Seismic Settlement Agreements Fulfill a Preliminary Step for New Courthouse*

San Francisco—The State Public Works Board (SPWB) today approved title transfers and agreements between the California Judicial Council and the County of San Diego, completing a long-negotiated settlement agreement prompted by the transfer in September 2008 of six San Diego court facilities from the county to the Judicial Council. The agreements lay the groundwork for a proposed new courthouse in Central San Diego. The San Diego Board of Supervisors approved the agreements in early November.

“We are grateful for the collaboration we have experienced with the County of San Diego in completing these transfers,” said Kenneth K. So, Presiding Judge, Superior Court of San Diego County. “This new courthouse will meet a critical need for a comprehensive, safe facility which provides more access to those who need our services.”

The Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) is proceeding with site feasibility analysis for the proposed new Central Courthouse. The proposed project will house 71 courtrooms in 704,000 square feet, consolidating operations from the current Central Courthouse as well as the Madge Bradley and Family Court buildings.

The proposed project, with an estimated total cost of \$633.9 million, is the largest to be funded by Senate Bill 1407. It was ranked as a “critical need” by the Judicial Council, making it among the highest priority capital-outlay projects for the judicial branch of California, and the SPWB authorized its funding plan in November, marking the formal start of the project.

SB 1407 was enacted by the state Legislature last year to provide up to \$5 billion in funding for 41 new and renovated court facilities using court user fees rather than the state’s general fund. It is estimated that the proposed project in San Diego could create more than 15,000 direct and indirect jobs as it progresses through design, construction, and completion.

Through the exchange agreements, the Judicial Council will receive title to three blocks of downtown San Diego property: two of the three blocks on which the existing Central Courthouse sits, as well as the block bounded by Union, West B, State, and West C streets, known as the Stahlman Block. This block, directly adjacent to the existing Hall of Justice and across the street from the Central Courthouse, is a preferred site for the proposed new courthouse.

The council will also be entitled to use, and also possibly ultimately obtain, the County’s equity interest in approximately 20,000 square feet of space in the Chula Vista Regional Justice Center, for much-needed additional court operations to address large increases in caseload in southern San Diego County.

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In exchange, the Judicial Council will take on seismic liabilities in five San Diego court facilities rated as Risk Level V according to the California Division of the State Architect's rating scale. These buildings include the existing County Courthouse, East County Regional Center, North County Regional Center Buildings F2 and F3, and Kearny Mesa Traffic/Small Claims Court.

As the Judicial Council has taken title to court buildings throughout California under the Trial Court Facilities Act of 2002 and subsequent legislation, counties retained seismic liability for buildings rated Level V or higher unless relieved of those obligations under one of several statutory exceptions. Among those exceptions is a "seismic settlement." San Diego County and the state are now able to execute such a settlement.

The Judicial Council will also return to the county two downtown court buildings once they are vacated by the court: the Madge Bradley and Family Court buildings. The council also agreed to include in its plans for a proposed downtown courthouse the construction of a secure tunnel to transport prisoners from the Central Jail to the planned new building, in consideration for the county's equity in the Chula Vista court building.

The AOC must perform environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act before finalizing a site for the proposed new courthouse. This environmental process is still in its earliest stages and could range from 8 to 18 months. The current project schedule is approximately six years, with completion scheduled for January 2016, but the project team will seek ways to accelerate that schedule if possible. The architecture firm of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill has already been selected as the architect and engineer for the proposed new courthouse.

More information about the project:

www.courtinfo.ca.gov/programs/occm/projects_sandiego.htm

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The Judicial Council is the policymaking body of the California courts, the largest court system in the nation. Under the leadership of the Chief Justice and in accordance with the California Constitution, the council is responsible for ensuring the consistent, independent, impartial, and accessible administration of justice. The Administrative Office of the Courts carries out the official actions of the council and promotes leadership and excellence in court administration.